



Nebraska History posts materials online for your personal use. Please remember that the contents of *Nebraska History* are copyrighted by the Nebraska State Historical Society (except for materials credited to other institutions). The NSHS retains its copyrights even to materials it posts on the web.

For permission to re-use materials or for photo ordering information, please see:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/magazine/permission.htm>

Nebraska State Historical Society members receive four issues of *Nebraska History* and four issues of *Nebraska History News* annually. For membership information, see:

<http://nebraskahistory.org/admin/members/index.htm>

Article Title: David Jones and Gwen Davies, Missionaries in Nebraska Territory, 1853-1860

Full Citation: Phillips G Davies, "David Jones and Gwen Davies, Missionaries in Nebraska Territory, 1853-1860," *Nebraska History* 60 (1979): 77-90.

URL of article: <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH1979Missionaries.pdf>

Date: 9/12/2014

Article Summary: David Jones Davies and his wife Gwen performed missionary work in eastern Nebraska spanning the years 1853-1860. Born in Wales, they met in Wisconsin and decided to become missionaries to the Omaha Indians during the time before Nebraska became a state. Part of the mission in which they worked was designed to convert Native American children to Christianity and to "civilize" them. Various accounts of the life of the Davieses, several of which were translated from the Welsh language, are discussed in this article.

Cataloging Information:

Names: David Jones Davies, Gwen (Roberts) Davies, David Jones, John Davies, Catherine Davies, Isaac Jones, Hugh Roberts, Mary Roberts, Thomas Roberts, H H Morris, John Caradoc Davies, Robert Davies, James Williams, J R Daniel, Edmund McKinney, Rudolph Kurz, Peter A Sarpy, Alice C Fletcher, Frances LaFlesche, Owen J Davis, William Hamilton, Charles Sturgis, Rev J A Jones, John H Keppel, E H Jones, John Price, Rev David Edwards,

Keywords: Calvinist; Methodist; Omaha (Indians); Presbyterian mission; Pawnee.

Photographs / Images: "Omaha and Otoe Mission at Bellevue from the East," painted by S W Y Schymonsky, about 1855; Gwen Robert Davies, about 1861, with children Hugh, baby Walter, and Claudia; David Jones about 1880

**DAVID JONES AND GWEN DAVIES,
MISSIONARIES IN NEBRASKA TERRITORY,
1853-1860**

By Phillips G. Davies

The best-known early missionary in Nebraska Territory is a Baptist, the Reverend Moses Merrill, who with his wife arrived at Bellevue in November, 1833, and continued to work among the Otoe Indians until his untimely death in 1840. Excerpts from his correspondence and from his diary and the journal of his wife have been published and give a full and interesting account of their lives. A man with some medical training, he was primarily concerned with learning the Otoe language so that he could translate hymns and portions of the Bible as a means of Christianizing the Indians. Considerable information is also available about the Reverend John Dunbar, a Presbyterian, who arrived in 1834 to work among the Pawnee.¹

The purpose of this article is to document the life and work of another missionary couple, David Jones Davies and his wife Gwen, whose missionary work in eastern Nebraska spanned the years 1853 to 1860.

The following discussion is based on various accounts of the life of the Davies family; several of the accounts have been translated from the Welsh language.²

David Jones Davies, known during much of his life as David Jones, was born in the parish of Llangristiolus, Anglesey, North Wales, on March 31, 1814. His parents, John and Catherine (or Catharine)³ Davies, were apparently engaged in farming—probably as tenant farmers, because John is reported to have received only six pence a day in wages. David was the oldest of nine children, and at an early age he began to work for farmers in the neighborhood.

It is likely that he received little or no formal education except in the local Sunday school. At that time these schools apparently were more concerned with teaching mere literacy (the ability to read and write) than in studying the Bible and

religious doctrine. However, it is clear that religion played an important part in young David's life. His parents are said to have been poor but pious people who "gave their young son the rich legacy of a religious training."⁴

His sister gave an example of his early concern about his personal salvation: "He had an alarming dream in which it seemed that the day of judgment had come, and he found himself under some certain tree in great terror." A similar episode is also recounted by his daughter:

He remained at home, on Sunday, to read, instead of going to [Sunday] school, and it happened that he took apart a watch he owned—which was not running well—and he failed to restore its parts, and some thought struck into his mind that he had broken the Sabbath, which proved as a fire in his bosom for a long period. He secured another watch and this stopped also. His conscience was smitten again, and on one occasion he was forced to go over the stone fence into the field and on his knees to pray for forgiveness.

Such deep feelings of conviction of sin were common in Wales at that time. Nevertheless, David did not actually become a church member until many years later. Evidence of his early religious feelings is provided by the account of a sundial, which he built near his old home in Anglesey before he left for America. It included the following inscription: "David Jones. 1840. Like the shadow of the sun's daily progress is the brief duration of man's life."

The major religious influence on him in these days was apparently not so much the Calvinist Methodist church of his parents as it was the local Church of England parson, Isaac Jones, who hired his services as a "careful and industrious" boy. It is not clear what sort of work David did for this man, but we know that besides encouraging his studies, Isaac Jones also "urged him to unite with the Church of England and to begin a systematic course of education." While at the parson's house, he began to study Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, apparently achieving a high degree of competence in them.

However, the parson's hopes were in vain, for even though not yet a church member himself, David "could not bring his mind to think of leaving the Calvinistic Methodist church."⁵ Nevertheless, his later comments about Isaac Jones indicate the closeness of the relationship: "Not many men of that generation would have taken notice of a poor lad and have given him as much help as Isaac Jones gave me." In fact, so close must the relationship have become, that when Jones

moved to Llanddeiniolen so did David. For a time David worked in a slate quarry at nearby Llanberis.

It was at Llanberis at the age of 27 that he finally became a member of the church at the Calvinist Methodist chapel at Cefnywaen. But work was apparently hard to find, and steady employment was uncertain. For instance, in 1844, he was working at Merthyr Tydfil, far down in South Wales, but he and 300 other men were dismissed with little or no warning.

Such economic uncertainties probably figured in David's decision to leave Wales, for in August, 1844, he boarded a ship for America.

His early years in this country are not well documented. He spent some time in Racine, Wisconsin, and three years in Beloit. His activities during this time are unknown, but it is most likely that he worked as a hired hand for farmers.

More is known about David's life after he purchased a farm in the newly established Proscairon Welsh settlement. He and his future wife Gwen were among the earliest settlers in this part of Green Lake County, Wisconsin. David married Gwen Roberts, the daughter of Hugh Roberts, on April 22, 1848.⁶ Her brother, the Reverend Thomas H. Roberts, was the first minister to be ordained by the Calvinist Methodist church in Wisconsin.

What little we know about the early life of Gwen comes from an obituary probably prepared by Daniel Williams. One of seven children of Hugh and Mary Roberts, she was born in Llanddeiniolen, Caernarvonshire, on January 21, 1823. Her parents, like David's, were known for their piety, and Gwen's first memories were of the church.

Her earliest recollections were the mile or two to church, "with her brother Thomas on his father's back, with her hand on his, and with sister Mary on the other side," and how he [her father] told them of the Babe of Bethlehem and other Bible stories.

She left Wales with her brother, Thomas, on April 1, 1844, along with the family of H. H. Morris, and reached Racine, Wisconsin, in May of the same year. They apparently traveled across the ocean and through the Great Lakes by ship. The rest of the family subsequently arrived, and the whole group went to the Proscairon district in Wisconsin in the fall of 1845.

The couple's early married life must not have been particularly happy, for their two young children, John Caradoc (born in March, 1849, according to family records) and Robert

(born June 27, 1851), became ill and died within a few days of each other. The writer of the obituary suggests this as the cause of the parents' later missionary activities. As he says, "This became the occasion of turning the thoughts of the grieving parents to work that had been a subject of consideration with them previous to this for some years, namely the mission field." Gwen is also reported to have "always longed for the missionary field."

Another influence in the decision to do missionary work may have been David's early friendship with a young Welshman by the name of James Williams, who was about to leave Wales as a missionary to Brittany, and whom David had guided to the top of Mount Snowdon in North Wales shortly after his own conversion. As they climbed, "the missionary spoke of the field and the people with whom he hoped to work with great enthusiasm and this made a deep impression on his traveling companion." Because of this friendship with Williams, David apparently studied the Breton language with such care that even in his old age he could read the Bible in it as easily as he could in Welsh.

In March, 1853, David and Gwen requested the church's permission to go to Nebraska Territory as missionaries. One account of the minutes of the Welsh Prairie Presbytery which was held at Proiscairon reads:

A brother and sister presenting themselves for the mission field were interviewed. The names of the missionaries are David and Mrs. Gwen Jones. After listening to their testimony of experience and dedication to the Indian work, they were granted letters of transfer by the presbytery, commending them to the Presbyterian missionary society, and they immediately departed for a mission field to labor among the Omaha Indians along the banks of the Platte River in the Nebraska Territory.'

Another account of the meeting—somewhat different and longer—should be noted. This is the report of J. R. Daniel, who was a clerk of the meeting held at Proiscairon on March 9, 10, and 11, 1853:

Two p.m. Conversation with a brother and sister who offered themselves for work in the mission field. The names of the missionaries were Mr. David Jones and Mrs. Gwen Jones. Mr. David Jones had been with us at all the meetings; but at 2 o'clock his wife accompanied him, together with their only child [presumably Mary, who had been born on July 19, 1852]. It is true that they were among their friends, but yet everybody regarded them as if they had never seen them before.

David Jones expressed his feelings in our presence somewhat in the following manner: "That to do some good in the heathen world had been on his mind ever since childhood, and that he had striven and labored much toward this end. (Our brother had gained in depth through his faithfulness in the study of languages.) He confessed that

this ambition had died down much in his breast since the beginning, and that the worst sin he had been guilty of was that he had not encouraged the promptings he had received. But at present he was exceedingly eager for the work, and blessed the Lord that he had obtained his desires and this with an inquiring wonderment, 'Whence came this to me?'

He said that if he might receive all the honor and gold in the world, that he would regard them all as but a handful of dust in comparison with the opportunity of doing some good to the Indians (with a gesture toward the floor). . . . Both desired a part in the prayers of the congregation, as well as of the church of God in the whole world.¹⁹ Without doubt there was more feeling on the part of our brother and sister than they could manifest; the effect of what they said proved this. Everybody wondered as they saw these two who had met, with a common spirit, as if they were one soul in two persons.

The meeting commended the two to the Missionary Society of the Presbyterian Church by a letter of recommendation. The two intend to labor with the missionaries who are among tribes of Indians known as the Omahas and Otoes, located on the Platte River.

Getting to Nebraska was no small task at that time. It is reported that

on the 14th day of April, 1853 . . . Dafydd¹¹ Jones and Mrs. Gwen Jones and one small child departed from Proscairon to the city of Portage, and from there in a boat down the Wisconsin river to Galena, Ill. and on the Mississippi river as far as St. Louis. From there they went up the Missouri to Bellevue, Nebraska where a tribe known as the Omaha Indians lived.¹²

The Presbyterian mission had been established by Edmund McKinney,¹³ who arrived in Bellevue in 1846. This small Indian-American community was described by Rudolph Kurz on his visit there in 1851:

May 14. Crossed over to Belle Vue, Mr. Peter A. Sarpy's trading house for the Omaha. There are still many emigrants in this part of the country. . . .

In Belle Vue besides Sarpy's house there was the place where the United States land [Indian] agent lived (Barrow by name. . . .), the school for Pawnee children (Ellet was the teacher's name), six log houses with adjoining plantations, where the half-breeds lived. . . . Farther below a Protestant mission and beyond McKinney, a trading place for the Oto and Omaha. . . . In Belle Vue I saw the first Indian huts of clay.¹⁴

A week later Kurz visited the Omaha village:

Their dwellings consisted of both skin tents (tipis) and clay huts, in the midst of which were scaffolds used for the curing of meat and high enclosures in which they confined their horses for safety. On the side from which I entered the village there was a narrow ditch or trench, whether constructed for defense (a shelter behind which they fired on their enemies) I do not know. At the time it was serving as depository for their 'commodities.'¹⁵

These new surroundings must have seemed very strange if not frightening to Jones who is reported to have been "the first missionary in the Welsh settlements of America to volunteer for home missionary work outside of the Welsh fields."¹⁶ Yet when he arrived the mission was well established. A boarding school



"Omaha and Otoe Mission at Bellevue from the East," painted by S. W. Y. Schymonsky, about 1855.

had been built to accommodate 40 students and by 1853 the enrollment was 42. The purpose of the school was to "civilize" the children as well as to convert them to Christianity. This was done by first removing them from their native culture. They were taught reading and writing along with Presbyterian Christianity. In addition, the boys worked at the mission farm while the girls were taught home economics.¹⁷

According to Alice C. Fletcher and Frances LaFlesche, the Omaha had their first opportunity to observe the use of plows and other agricultural implements in the fields and gardens attached to the school. Although traders had introduced the iron hoe, no basic change was made in the old method of planting and cultivating corn. The Omaha had never before seen earth plowed in furrows or corn planted in long, straight rows.

As later material in this article will show, David seems to have been mostly engaged in kitchen and farm work and agricultural training. It is doubtful that either he or his wife took part in the general teaching, religious instruction, or war against the Indians' use of liquor, as had been the case with the Merrills and the Dunbars.

David and his family probably lived in Bellevue until the spring of 1856 when they moved to the vicinity of present-day Macy, Thurston County, to help build the new mission school.¹⁸ Two years before, the Omaha had agreed to relinquish all claims to the newly created Nebraska Territory in exchange for a reservation and yearly annuities of goods and money. Possibly the most eventful happening during Davies' years with the

Omaha was this removal to the reservation some 70 miles to the north.

In 1857 the Presbyterian Mission followed the tribe and the next year a large stone structure erected for its use was completed. The mission house stood on a bench overlooking the Missouri River. . . . The missionaries and their families dwelt in the house, and the Omaha children were thus brought under their immediate care. The children were all given English names, most of which remain until the present time. . . . The children were taught to speak, read, and write English. The boys were instructed in farming and the care of stock, the girls in cooking and making of garments. The work accomplished by these missionaries [during a period of 30 years] has been of lasting benefit to the people and the teachers and workers who so assiduously labored to prepare the Omaha to live among their rapidly increasing white neighbors are today held in grateful and affectionate remembrance."

One major piece of first-hand evidence of the missionaries' lives in Nebraska is an undated letter from Blackbird Hills,²⁰ which is found in the obituary. In it David Davies writes to his sister. It obviously dates from a period near the end of their service there. After commenting on family matters, including the death of his mother and sister, Jane, apparently back in Wisconsin, he writes at length about the Indians:

I wrote you three or four years ago, but I do not know whether you received the letter or not: in it there was a good portrait of one of the American Indians, that is to say, the original inhabitants, those who dwelt in the land before the white men ever saw it. You are aware that it is among these people we have lived for about five years now. We came here under the name of Assisting Missionaries, to help in the teaching of a tribe of Indians known as the Omahas; there is no doubt that they need teaching; but they, wretched people, like all others without education, are very far from any appreciation of teaching, either religious or moral. "As their fathers did, so do they, to this very day."

It is possible that you know but little of the history of the American Indians, nor can I, through the medium of a letter, give you anything, except a little of their story. But as I said, they were the aborigines, and they were called "Indians" by Columbus, the discoverer, because he supposed that America was the eastern part of India. America, at that time, was well inhabited, especially the southern part of it. The inhabitants were all in their pagan condition, though they did not worship gods made by their own hands. They had a species of knowledge of the true God, whom they recognized and worshipped in various ways in accordance with their own imaginings, to which they cling to this day.

The Spaniards put the inhabitants of the south part to death by their warfare, in order that they might become possessed of their gold and silver, and these they had in abundance. When the English began to occupy these northern parts, they were not half so bloodthirsty. For a long time they lived in comparative peace. But as they too increased they desired more land, though they had a hundred times more than either side needed. Strife, however, arose; the Indians were pushed on toward the west; their land was occupied by strangers and one portion of the people after another was moved from its native soil. They were defrauded in every manner and in all sections. When it was desired to acquire more land, their chiefs were flattered and bribed and made drunken until their consent was obtained to sell their lands, and then the people were moved on toward the west, where they dwelt in constant war, or on the other hand, suffered greater destruction because of the white men who lived near them for the sake of carrying on trade, and these often paid with rum and whiskey for what they had

bought from the Indians. For one cause and another, therefore, a great number of them have been removed from the face of the earth and there is but a record of them in books and through the few remains of them that are dug out of the earth now and then in various localities.

The tribes which are found in the mountains between us and California and Oregon are as they were formerly as regards their usages and customs; but those who dwell adjacent to the inhabited country have lost many of these, and have learned, instead, the evil customs of the white man, with but very little of his good ones. They are thus, all things considered, in a situation almost hopeless toward accomplishing anything for their betterment, and as a nation they are rapidly vanishing from the face of the earth, though some tribes which have been civilized and Christianized are growing and increasing like other nations.

The civilized ones live in houses and till the soil; those that are uncivilized, as the Omahas subsist by what they take by hunting, and they make tents of skins in which to dwell. Until a few years ago the Omahas had no material for clothing except buffalo hides, but now they clothe themselves in blankets, since they have killed off almost all of the buffaloes. About four years ago they sold their lands to the government—a territory which extended about 300 miles in one direction and about 150 in the other. The price for which they sold was about five-pence per acre, and the land was good for the most part; yes, excellent, compared with the land in Wales. Yearly they receive their pay, at the rate of so much annually, and this continues for forty years, and then ceases.

They retained for themselves somewhat above 300,000 acres, upon which they now dwell. The highest price for which the government sells this to any one who chooses to buy is one dollar and a quarter per acre—about five-shillings, six-pence of British money. You see, therefore, that it is easier for a poor man to acquire a farm here than on the banks of Menai Straits.

This harsh but just review of the whites' treatment of the Indians is followed by a rather detailed account of the family:

Before I close, let me add a word about the family. I have two children yet living, and we have buried three—two boys, one of two years and the other of six weeks; also a daughter died after our coming here, and she was then fifteen months old [Mary, who had been born shortly before they left Wisconsin]. Of those who are alive: the older is a daughter, who is about three years of age, and the younger, a boy of about a year.

The name of the boy is Hugh [born on February 12, 1855], and the daughter is called Claudia [born on February 7, 1853]. We chose to call her by this name out of respect to Claudia, or Gwladus, who lived about 1800 years ago, who, says history, was taken as a prisoner to Rome, and there heard the preaching of Paul and was converted; and after she was set free, and her family, she became the means of carrying the gospel to her nation, that is to say, our own ancestors. My hope and desire is that Claudia may, if she lives, be like her, be a means to a similar end, to those who yet dwell in the dark places of the earth.

Finally he comments that "it is possible that we shall not be in this place long, therefore, direct your next letter to the care of Owen, thus: Owen J. Davis, Racine, Wisconsin."

There are good reasons to believe that the couple's stay at the mission was far from happy; there clearly were tensions between them and some of the mission officials. In one of two detailed reports to the Presbyterian mission home office, William Hamilton in 1856 found the couple unsuitable for working with children, David because of his temper, and Gwen because of her lack of neatness:

Your plan also for Mr. Jones to board them [the Indian children] *will be a failure*. He has been cook for some two months. He does the best he can, but it has been difficult at times to keep some of the hands. Mrs. Jones will hardly do more than take care of her *self*, and *expected charge*.¹¹

A few months later he wrote as follows:

You ask my views freely about Mr. Jones, and I will give them. I have no doubt of Mr. Jones being a good man, and would be a pleasant neighbor. He is of a quick temper but to those who understand it, and can control *their own*, that need be no great barrier, but it is not good for *children to be under such*. He told me he did not wish to be under obligations to go out in all kinds of weather. I [illegible] want a man that is not afraid of the weather. But when I say that Mr. Jones is a good man, (and I believe him to be sincerely desirous of doing good) I have said about all. The general impression with all who know them is that their influence among the Indians *is not good*. There is an utter want of *neatness* in their habits. LaFlesche [an Indian tribal leader] and his wife are much neater housekeepers than they are.

Later in the same letter he adds the following brief comments:

She especially seems to think she knows about all. Their habits are formed, and will likely remain what they are. He can do an excellent day's work, if *set at it* and not interrupted. Neither of them are at all fit to *train children*. . . . Mr. Jones has expressed himself as willing to stay if wanted, or to go if *not wanted*, and I think he hardly expects to stay. . . . They have done what they could, but they are not calculated to do much good in their present sphere. . . . It was difficult to keep the hands last summer under Mr. and Mrs. Jones cooking.¹²

But despite this rather condemnatory report, and despite Hamilton's belief that they would leave soon, the family continued at the mission. Three years later the new supervisor, Charles Sturgis, expressed a much less severe view of David Jones when Jones was about to leave the mission.

Mr. Jones, The Govmt. Farmer,¹³ has been removed and another appointed in his place. I think however the Agent rather regrets doing this, for Mr. Jones was a faithful man in his position, and I believe him to be a good man. He is [as] industrious, I find, as the largest proportion of the people in these regions. . . . His intention now is to return to his former home somewhere in Wisconsin, I think, early in the spring. He recounted to me a few days since his troubles and trials here and it would seem he had been wronged. . . . He is obstinate in his way, but there is no difficulty in managing him.¹⁴

There are few other references to the family in the mission records. In 1860 he is reported as having saved the mission's oldest cow from dying "by feeding her the hay from his own bed." It is also possible that the family may have been popular with the Indian children; for in a list of the "white" names of the students, along with Jonathan Edwards, George Washington, and James Buchanan, one finds two obviously Welsh names, Howell Harris and Charles Morgan. It would appear, however, that the family's main work during these years was on the farm and in the kitchen.

Why the Davies family decided to leave Nebraska is not known for certain. Tensions of the sort just described may have

been the cause, although Gwen's aging father, Hugh Roberts, may have provided a strong incentive.

We are told that there were three things which old Hugh Roberts of Proscairon wished to see fulfilled before his death: "A [religious] Revival, the freeing of the slaves, and the return of his daughter Gwen and her husband from among the Indians. And he got his wish. The Spirit came in its strength in 1859, the missionaries came back from Nebraska to Wisconsin in 1860, and the slaves were freed in 1865."²⁵ Hugh Roberts died in 1865, three years after the couple had moved to the Lime Spring, Iowa, area.

There is one account from the short period when they remained in Wisconsin. It deals with their return and was written by the Reverend J. A. Jones:

In Proscairon I first met Mr. D. J. Davies, and his wife, Mrs. Gwen Davies. They had recently come home from educating the Indians in Nebraska. I saw those Indians when I was on a hunt for buffaloes, and one of them showed me how Mr. Davies taught him to hold a plow. Mr. Davies told me that he was eager to find a place suitable for having a Welsh settlement. Within three years he was in his house in Minnesota, near Lime Spring. His brother, Deacon William Davies, and his numerous family came with him. There had been four Welsh families in the neighborhood just mentioned, and that was the start of that large settlement. Claudia Davies was seven years old when her mother bought a book for her in Proscairon with large letters in the year 1860. But she had grown into a handsome and beautiful girl when I returned to the Lime Spring districts in 1874. It can be seen that the adventuresome spirit of the people of Proscairon was the reason for the beginning of this Welsh settlement.²⁶

So within two years after they returned from Nebraska, along with his brother and his family, the Joneses set out to the West, apparently to look for inexpensive farm land.

They crossed the Mississippi at Prairie du Chien, and continued on toward Osage, Iowa. There was a Welshman or two, with whom William Davies had acquaintance, over the state line, in Minnesota. The two brothers went over to see them; the country pleased them, they bought land, and there they thereafter made their homes.

They settled in Beaver Township, Fillmore County, Minnesota, about 7 miles from Lime Springs [at that time called Lime Spring], Iowa, in July, 1861. Here it was that Jones changed his name from David Jones to David Jones Davies²⁷ because his former name "was confusing to his American neighbors. They could not understand how one of two brothers could be named Jones and the other Davies."²⁸ Here, too, it was that he came to be known as Dafydd Jones yr Indiaid or David Jones the Indian.²⁹

The later years of the former missionary and his wife were spent in farming, although his interest in religion continued and



Gwen Roberts Davies, about 1861, with children Hugh (left), baby Walter, and Claudia. Courtesy of Gwen Thomas Rusk, Des Moines, Iowa.



David Jones about 1880, from Hanes Cymry Minnesota, ed. Thomas E. Hughes et. al., (1895).

he served as a deacon of the church in the Proscairon district for about 20 years.³⁰ He continued to read and study languages extensively. Besides his knowledge of Breton, he could read the Bible in Hebrew and Greek with ease. He also was a close student of Welsh poetry and of history in general.

But despite the care he took with his health—drinking his tea after eating his meals rather than as he ate, as was more customary—his health declined slowly over the years. Ten years before he died he was injured by one of the farm animals and thus “for years he could not rise out of a chair unless assisted by the hands; but once on his feet he walked briskly. . . . So he continued—the outward man suffering decay, but the inward man renewed from day to day, until the 22nd day of September, 1891, when, after some three days of illness, he left us, at the age of seventy-seven years.” At the funeral services, the Reverend John H. Keppel preached a sermon based on Acts 13:36: “For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption.” He was buried in Foreston cemetery, where a new gravestone was recently substituted.

Parts of brief contemporary biographical accounts provide a good summary of his character. One, by E. H. Jones, reports that Davies

was a man of strong intellectual grasp, who by wide reading and careful study had become well posted in scriptural and secular knowledge. He was also possessed of a most excellent Christian spirit, which greatly endeared him to all that knew him.”

Another, quoted in its entirety, goes as follows:

Dafydd Jones (as he was called in the early part of his life) came to this country at the end of 1844 and to the Proscairon district fairly early in his life. He and his wife had been missionaries with the Indians for seven years, from 1853 to 1860. He died in 1891 at 77 years of age. His widow, who is still living, was the daughter of Hugh Roberts. G. Williams said: “Dafydd Jones was a studious and learned man, and especially so in some directions, and was especially emotional and tender and was very eager to do good to all in every manner. He was so sensitive and tender that he was not in the habit of being cruel to the insignificant creatures, and he was not doing that even when they were doing evil to him. When the little gophers began to destroy the corn and all had a plan of destroying them completely, he asserted that they had no right to do that, for they were the small creatures of the great Creator, and that it would be more reasonable to save them and feed them by scattering the corn along the surface of the land amply enough so that there would be no need for the little things to be forced to destroy it. He held meetings with the children to enlighten and instruct them in religious matters, and to produce and nourish in them a spirit to do some good in their time. O, how he would use himself up in his zeal to stimulate some good in these meetings. His missionary spirit came to light in many ways. He was especially of service to the missionaries in the district.”

Gwen, the partner of his missionary activities, continued to live until 1920, spending the last 13 years of her life in the home of her daughter Claudia and her second husband, John Price, in Lime Springs. Claudia's first husband, William H. Thomas, had died in 1874." She continued her strong interest in religion and Welsh affairs. For instance, she attended a reunion of old settlers at Proscairon, in June, 1893, addressing the group and writing portions of the book subsequently published about the settlement. Of her address, only the following report is available: "Mrs. Davies spoke especially 'educationally and suggestively when she said how great was the difference between the picnic at the Proscairon Reunion and the other picnics and parties which were so common in these days.'""

Her interest in temperance is one of the few details noted in one account of the Davies family. "Mrs. Gwen Davies felt a great zeal for temperance and prohibition and lived to see the saloons closed in our land.""

Gwen Davies died on December 17, 1920, five weeks before her 98th birthday, survived by Claudia and Walter, two granddaughters (one by adoption), nine grandsons, and six great-grandchildren. Hugh, her other son, died in 1908. As the obituary succinctly states, "her chief concern was not wealth and material success," but to be a good and true follower of her Lord and Savior.

The funeral took place at their home and at the Welsh church in Lime Springs with the Reverend David Edwards and the Reverend G. M. Shoemaker conducting the services. Burial was in Foreston cemetery.

The highest of compliments to the two women of the family are found in the same religious journal, *Cyfaill*. After commenting on the fact that Claudia, the daughter, did not, as her father had hoped, ever become a missionary, the writer goes on, "she was well known for her faithfulness to the Cause of the Lord" and concludes: "If anyone should ever publish a book about 'Famous Women in the Association' [of Calvinist Methodists] in this country, Mrs. Gwen Davies and her daughter, Mrs. Claudia Price, would be very deserving of a chapter in the volume.""

Thus it was that two young people born in Wales met in Wisconsin and decided to become missionaries to the Omaha Indians during the time before Nebraska became a state, and

performed work "of lasting benefit to the people." Surely they deserve to be "held in grateful and affectionate remembrance."³⁶

NOTES

1. For Merrill, see *Transactions and Reports of the Nebraska State Historical Society*, 4 (1892), 157-191 and 5 (1893), 205-240. For Dunbar's own account see *Collections of the Nebraska State Historical Society*, 16 (1911), 268-287 and *Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society*, 14 (1918). Little is known about a few other missionaries mentioned by Merrill and Dunbar. Neither refers to Davies.

2. The major source is an unpublished, typed, 11-page obituary prepared by Mrs. Davies' nephew, Daniel Wililams, at the time of her husband's death. This document is in the possession of Mrs. Owen Rusk of Des Moines, Iowa. She is the great-granddaughter of the missionaries and has kindly allowed me to use the material for this article. All quotations and other material not otherwise acknowledged are from this document.

3. The spelling "Catharine" is given in *Hanes Cymry Minnesota [A History of the Welsh in Minnesota]*, edited by the Reverend Thomas E. Hughes et al., (Mankato, Minnesota, no publisher, 1895). Part of the book is in English and part is in Welsh.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Church membership in Wales at this time was not the nearly automatic thing that one might expect. People did not become members until they were young adults, and then only after rigorous inquiry about their beliefs and their private lives.

6. Hughes, *A History of the Welsh in Minnesota*.

7. *Ibid.*

8. "Ymysg yr Indiaid" [Among the Indians], *Y Cyfaill*, (Utica, New York, April, 1930), 122-123. This was a Welsh language, religious publication. Quotations are translated.

9. Daniel Jenkins Williams, *One Hundred Years of Welsh Calvinistic Methodism in America* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1937), 349. This account is inaccurate insofar as the village was actually located on the forks of Papillion Creek slightly west of Bellevue.

10. Either Daniel or the obituary writer should have closed his quotes at this point.

11. Davies' first name was spelled both David and Dafydd. Because the "f" in Welsh is pronounced "v," the pronunciation of the two forms would be very similar. Also Davies at times appears as Davis—the Welsh pronunciation of the former form being closer to the latter spelled form.

12. Anonymous, "Among the Indians."

13. The account in *Cyfaill* incorrectly spells his name Edward Kinney.

14. Journal of Rudolph Friederich Kurz. Smithsonian Institution *Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin* 115 (1937), 60-61. The Pawnee school was an offshoot of John Dunbar's earliest mission, now a government school. The "Indian huts of clay" were earth lodges which might exceed sixty feet in diameter.

15. *Ibid.*, 62.

16. *Hanes Boreuol Ardal Proscairon, Wisconsin [A History of the Early Days of the Proscairon, Wisconsin District]*, edited by Owen Thomas, (Utica, New York; T. J. Griffiths, 1894). Quotations from this source have been translated.

17. For an account of this mission see "The Otoe and Omaha Mission House" by Amanda Krider in "La Belle Vue," *Studies in the History of Nebraska*, Jerold L. Simmons, ed., 1976.

18. For an account of the new mission see Norma Kidd Green's "The Presbyterian Mission to the Omaha Indian Tribe," *Nebraska History*, 48 (1967), 267-288.

19. Alice C. Fletcher and Francis La Flesche, "The Omaha Tribe." Smithsonian Institution, *Bureau of American Ethnology Twenty-seventh Annual Report 1911*. The dates given are one year too late.

20. Blackbird Hill is a well-known landmark about three miles southeast of Macy, Nebraska, and about four miles south of the mission school. Blackbird Creek runs through the Indian reservation.

21. William Hamilton to Walter Lowrie, December 20, 1856, "Letters of Presbyterian Missionaries Among the American Indians," Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, which Society has given permission for the author to quote.

22. William Hamilton to Walter Lowrie, February 2, 1856.

23. A government farmer was remunerated for his services by the federal government but was frequently hired on the recommendation of the missionary.

24. Charles Sturgis to Walter Lowrie, December 21, 1859.

25. Anonymous, "Among the Indians."

26. Thomas, *A History of Early Days of the Proscairon*.

27. It was rather common for Welsh at the time not to use the family name, but only the given and middle names.

28. Williams, *One Hundred Years of Welsh Calvinistic Methodism in America*.

29. This reflects another Welsh custom. Because of the sparsity of Welsh surnames, Jones the baker, for instance, would be known as Jones the Bread, and Jones the postmaster as Jones the Post.

30. Hughes, *A History of the Welsh in Minnesota*.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Thomas, *A History of the Early Days of the Proscairon*.

33. Hughes, *A History of the Welsh in Minnesota*.

34. Thomas, *A History of the Early Days of the Proscairon*.

35. Anonymous, "Among the Indians."

36. Fletcher and LaFlesche, "The Omaha Tribe."